

GREENWorks

Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

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Freecycling: Trash to Treasure!

You've heard of recycling, but what about *freecycling*? The concept of freecycling involves making items that are no longer useful to you available to someone or a group of people that may need or desire the item you'd otherwise throw out.

Need to get rid of something? Many of us donate unwanted items to charities like Goodwill or the Salvation Army. But what do you do when you have items that neither will accept? Freecycle it. Freecycling can take many forms. It can be as simple as emailing your friends and family, posting notes on bulletin boards at work, or posting them on online sources such as Craigslist or Freecycle.org.

Freecycle.org was created in 2003 in order to limit the amount of unwanted items that are constantly piling up in landfills worldwide. According to its website, the Freecycle concept has since spread to over 85 countries, where there are thousands of local groups representing millions of members. The Freecycle Network is an organization that takes the phrase, "One man's trash is another man's treasure," and puts it in to action. The Freecycle Network claims that its group keep nearly 500 tons a day out of landfills.

Freecycling can even work in the reverse if you are in need of something. Tell the online community what you need and chances are there's someone out there who's trying to get rid of exactly what you're looking for. And best of all, the item is free!

So how can you get involved with freecycling? With the start of school comes back-to-school shopping, which could mean a new backpack, lunchbox, school supplies, clothes—expensive items you buy every year and throw out when your kid grows out of them. So your son hates last year's Spiderman backpack. Post it online and maybe you can trade for a Batman one instead. Are your kids growing faster than the money tree you planted to pay for all their clothes? Instead of buying new ones that you'll just need to replace in six months, look to freecycle them.

Freecycling is certainly not limited to clothing; freecycling sporting equipment is also gaining popularity. If your daughter danced ballet last year but now she wants to try soccer, see if you can find someone to trade their cleats for her old ballet slippers. Even if you can't barter a trade, don't toss those old tutus. Freecycling isn't just about getting new (old) stuff; it's about reducing the amount of waste we burden the earth with each time we drag our trashcans to the curb.

If you don't have kids, you can still benefit from freecycling. One practice that's becoming more popular is freecycling paint. Say you have leftover paint from renovating your kitchen and you want to tackle the bedrooms next - maybe your neighbor has the color you're looking for, or maybe you could organize a paint swap in your community.

So next time you go to throw something out, remember that just because the garbage truck took it away, it doesn't mean it's gone. Instead, it's sitting in a landfill, along with the other millions of tons of garbage we generate. So even if you think something is useless, don't make tossing it your only option. First, try freecycling it.